



EPILEPSY

FACT SHEET 26

INTRODUCTION

Epilepsy is often given different names, including the terms seizures, convulsions and fits. It is a relatively common problem, affecting all breeds of dogs and cats. Epilepsy can take several forms and the symptoms can vary considerably: from very minor, to major, life-threatening situations. This fact sheet is designed to outline the various signs and to suggest how Denes can help.

CAUSES

Epileptic attacks are caused by abnormal electrical discharges occurring in the brain, a little like a short circuit. There are several distinct causes, although there is often no one, definite reason. Cases of this type are termed idiopathic epilepsy. Other cases can arise from specific problems, including:

- Kidney disease
- Liver disease
- Heart disease
- Poisoning, such as with anti-freeze and lead
- Diabetes
- Metabolic disturbances, including eclampsia
- Infections, such as distemper and tetanus
- Trauma to the head
- Brain tumours

The sex of the animal, as well as the age and breed, can also influence the predisposition to epileptic attacks. Epilepsy can also be influenced by certain drugs and, in bitches, by the oestrus cycle.

Certain stimuli can also trigger epileptic attacks in patients with a history of epilepsy. These can include becoming over-excited, becoming over-sexed, getting too hot and being exposed to bright, flashing lights and to stressful situations.

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

Epileptic attacks can be divided up into 4 distinct phases, although in some animals it is not very easy to distinguish between the different stages.

The first stage is the **prodromal** phase, where the animal shows odd or unusual behaviour for several hours leading up to an attack. It is sometimes quite easy to see this stage in dogs, but it is much more difficult to see this happening in cats.

The second stage is called the **aura** and occurs when the animal changes its behaviour in the period just before the epileptic attack.

The **ictal** or **fit** stage is the period that most people would recognise as the typical epileptic fit. Symptoms can vary from minor trembling or twitching of the limbs or facial muscles, to collapse or complete loss of consciousness, with violent

thrashing or spasms of the limbs and foaming at the mouth, together with urination and defaecation. Other signs can include dilation of the pupils, rigidity of the limbs, chewing movements of the jaws and salivation or drooling. This stage normally only lasts a few minutes but in some instances the fits do not stop. This condition is referred to as status epilepticus and constitutes a medical emergency. Some animals may have several epileptic fits in small clusters with distinct gaps in between.

The final stage is the **postictal** phase that follows directly after the acute attack. Many animals will show odd behaviour during this phase, including general unease. Other symptoms noted during this phase include a period of confusion, depression, apparent blindness, unsteadiness, pacing up and down and an increase in thirst or appetite. These signs normally go after an hour or two.

TREATING EPILEPSY

There are several drugs that your vet may use to help control the symptoms. Depending on the frequency and severity of the attacks, your vet may choose not to use any medication at all, or to use a combination of several drugs to help the problem, if the fits are very bad. Commonly used drugs include phenobarbitone, primidone and phenytoin sodium. Although these drugs often work well, they can be toxic to the liver and need to be monitored carefully. Other drugs that may be prescribed can include some hormone preparations, sedatives and some human anti-epileptic drugs.

HOW DENES CAN HELP

There are several ways in which you can help, in addition to any advice or treatment that your vet may give. Some animals will benefit from an additive free diet, as chemical additives can be a contributory factor in some cases. All Denes recipes for both dogs and cats are additive free.

Certain herbal remedies can also be useful. The herbs in **Denes Tranquil Plus Tablets**, a supplement including valerian and skullcap, have a long association with helping with problems of this type and can be used alongside conventional medication. In fact in the past, skullcap was used as a specific herb for treating epilepsy and was once known as 'mad dog weed'.

Where there is an existing liver condition, or where the anti-epileptic drugs are causing a problem, **Denes Milk Thistle Plus Tablets** can also help, by supporting the liver.

Other useful fact sheets to read:

- Liver disease
- Helping with behavioural problems

If you have any queries concerning your pet's health or feeding problems, you can contact us for free pet care advice by:

- Visiting our website www.denes.com
- Emailing us at info@denes.com
- Calling us on **01273 325364** Mon-Fri, 9am – 12Noon
- Writing to us at:
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